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AUTHOR Vaughan, Jerry L.
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ABSTRACT

The demographic context of the baby boom in the United States (1946-1964) as well as past and future impacts of this population increase are considered in this review of research. During the 18-year period, over 76,000,000 babies were born, more than the entire population of the United States in 1900. Reasons for the increase are attributed to economic affluence, patriotism, and the "procreation ethic." Early impacts were in medicine and education, particularly in the construction of new facilities. As the cohorts aged, they influenced the relaxation of college entrance requirements, grade inflation, demands for more fulfilling work, and a restructuring of economic thought concerning supply and demand. The increase in rural population growth, which represents a change in values, is also attributable to the baby boom generation. Researchers predict that during the period 1983-2050 a "superclass" of well-educated couples will be created who will affect dress, entertainment, eating habits, travel, buying patterns, and values. Politically, third party movements will be based on the unaffiliated millions of baby boomers. Although this generation will be the most educated, many professions will become obsolete. The growth industry of the future will be health care. (KC)

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THE MAJOR IMPACTS OF THE BABY BOOM UPON AMERICAN LIFE 1945 - 2050

By

Jerry L. Vaughan

April 25, 1983

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The nation appears to have embarked upon a 20 year cycle of boom and bust economics and demographics.

The changing age and economic structure of the U.S. portends a new concept of the household of the future. This future household will be dominated by an economic superclass that can achieve its dreams of affluence.

It is anticipated that consumer patterns will not be dominated by the deciding factor of youth and that a technologically based challenge to the concept of representative democracy will occur. While no radical changes in the American scene are anticipated it is nevertheless expected that both the economic and political institutions will be under constant stress.

The Baby Boom generation is the most educated generation in the history of the U.S., however, technological and economic conditions will render many occupational skills obsolete. Employment will be a function of an aging population with a surplus of Hi-Tech entry-level jobs and a squeeze in opportunities for managerial positions.

The growth industry of the future is destined to be Health Care.

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THE MAJOR IMPACTS OF THE BABY BOOM UPON AMERICAN LIFE 1945 - 2050

Section I: The Demographic Context of the Baby Boom: Trends and Projections

The "Baby Boom" Generation

The "Baby Boom" generation is the group of Americans that changed the way of life in the United States. For two centuries, the U.S. birthrate had steadly declined. Then in an unprecedented transition following World War II, American women began an 18-year fertility cycle that resulted in the births of 76,441,000 babies. By way of historical prespective (Weller, 1981), the 1900 Census revealed that 300 years of births and immigration into this country had resulted in 76,000,000 American residents.

Incredible as it seems, in just 18 years American mothers delivered more new babies than the entire population of the United States in 1900. The significance and impact of this "boom" bored into every facet of life in the United States. It is estimated that education, sports, music, politics, crime rates, employment and economics will be affected by the baby boomers until the year 2045. It is speculated that the effects of this generation will be felt even farther into the future than is realized.

The Historical Context

According to Weller (1981), the first Colonial settlement at Jamestown, Virginia, had only 100 inhabitants in the year 1607. One hundred eighty-three years later, at the conclusion of the first census

in 1790, a population of four million persons was identified. A crude birthrate of about 55 per 1,000 combined with a crude death rate of 25 per 1,000 and massive immigration seems to have been responsible for this classic example of population growth.

By the middle of the 19th century (1850), it is estimated that there were 23.2 million Americans. After 1850, the rate of population growth slowed somewhat. The rate of population growth between 1900 and 1950 was even slower than the historical trends. In general, decreasing fertility rates were responsible for the slower population growth.

Weller (1981) states that fertility was high during the Colonial Period. During this period, each woman averaged 8 to 10 live births. By 1850, women were averaging 5.5 live births. By 1900, the fertility rate was 3.6. The fertility rate continued to decline until a 1937 low of 2.2 was realized. In 1940, the birthrate began to rise and by 1946 the explosive "baby boom" population growth was underway. Two centuries of fertility decline were reversed.

What Caused It?

Weller (1981) attributes the fertility rates of the 1920's as the primary causal factor in the baby boom period of 1946 to 1964. According to Weller (1981), during the period of 1946 to 1964, the proportion of women in their child-bearing years was greater than usual. The percentage of the women who remained single dropped significantly, while at the same time, the average age at marriage decreased. Couples began having their children sooner after marriage and closer together. Couples also had children later in age than before. Those couples remaining childless declined to a new low.

Weller (1981) also cites improved Infant Mortality Rates as a factor in the baby boom population explosion. As late as 1800, Infant Mortality Rates of 200 or more per 1,000 births were the rule. By 1978, the Infant Mortality Rate in the United States was 13.8. In general, the more modernized a country, the lower it's IMR. During the "baby boom" period, the United States was the world example of modernization and industrialization.

Easterlin (1980) argues that an economic causality governed couples in their choice of having babies during the baby boom period. This economic causaltiy was a function of their potential earning power and the belief that their actural material aspirations could be realized. According to Easterlin (1980), since 1940, the factors that precipitated the baby boom have set into motion a socio-economic cycle that portends the relative size of a generation. This cycle, proposed by Easterlin (1980), suggests that small generations of population beget large generations and large generations of population beget small generations -- the determining factor being the economic conditions of (1) relative income and (2) employment prospects that are spawned by the relative size of the generation. Should Easterlin's theory prove demographically accurate, we will begin experiencing a 20 year cycle of boom and bust economics and demographics.

Jones (1980) suggests that there were social factors as well as economic factors that contributed to the surge in births after World War II. To begin with, pregnancy became patriotic. Childbearing was an affirmation of victory and the fulfillment of promises made when American males went to war. Jones (1980) indicates that the 1946-1964

fertility boom was just a coincidence with the economic expansion during that time. Jones (1980) observes that it was psychological forces and not economic forces that contributed to the population growth during the baby boom period. He cites the idea that the world economy grew and expanded during the baby boom period. However, only Canada, Australia and New Zealand experienced the same type of population growth phenomena that the United States experienced. Jones (1980) observes that children were no longer an economic necessity as was the case in frontier or rural America. Instead, babies were expected to yield a stream of psychic income through time. This idea, together with the idea that it was the exclusive role of women to bear and rear children, generated the "Procreation Ethic." As Jones (1980) points out, the rules of the Preocreation Ethic were clear and unmistakable. Briefly, they were:

1. It was preferable to marry than not to marry. If a person chose to remain single he or she had a responsibility to explain why.

2. It was preferable to be a parent than to be a non-parent. The couples who did not have any children were considered unconventional. The only excuses accepted were medical or financial.

3. It was preferable not to have an "only" child, expecially in the suburbs.

What is important is that the baby boom mothers were having an abnormally large number of children. This was due to at least three trends that were operating during the period. These trends were:

1. A postponement of childbearing by a generation of older women who normally might have completed their families during the Depression and World War II.

2. An advancement of about three years in the time younger women began their families.

3. An overall rise in the number of children that women actually had during the boom period.

Jones (1980) seems to feel that the "Invisible Hand" of economic development merely reinforced the psychological and sociological forces that were operating in the society during the baby boom period.

The Changing Age Structure and the Future

According to Sternlieb and Hughes (1978), the shifting patterns of childbearing in the three and one-half decades since World War II have had a profound impact on the age structure of American society. The youth-oriented society of the baby boom is gradually fading from the scene. The percentage of population between the ages of 5 and 17 declined one percent between 1960 and 1976. The dependency ratio (the number of persons under 15 and those 65 or older per 100 persons of age 15 to 65) will increase as the Baby Boom generation approaches retirement toward the end of the century. As a consequence, the nation is now experiencing an increase in the median age of the population. On Census Day, April 1, 1980, the nation's median age was 30 years. This can be compared to a median age of 28 years that existed in 1970 and a median age of under 17 years that existed in Colonial times.

The Census Bureau (Sternlieb and Hughes, 1978) cites three reasons for this incease--(1) a decline in the fertility of American women, (2) the aging of the Baby Boomers, and (3) growing longevity.

The 1980 Census Report on the age characteristics of America's 226.5 million residents also showed a continuing gap in the median age between sexes. This is due to the fact that women have a longer life expectancy. In 1980, the median age for women was 31.3 years as compared to 28.8 years for men.

Classically described as a "Pig in a Python," as the Baby Boomers moved toward maturity, other demographic characteristics emerged. By

1970 the number of persons in the 18-24 year old category grew by 24,687,000--a whopping 53 percent increase over the 1960 population in that category. By 1980 the 18-24 age group grew by another 19 percent to a total of 29,462,000. The sheer size of this generation portends major social and economic problems as the first "Baby Boomers" begin retiring at age 70 in the year 2016. Increaseing life expectancies (presently 72 years for men--longer for women) compound the problems.

If present fertility rates continue at replacement levels (2.1), then by the middle of the next century the median age of the United States will be 38 years and over 16 percent of the population will be age 65 or older.

Section II: Past Impacts of the Baby Boom: 1945-1982

The First Impacts of the Baby Boom

The first impacts of the baby boom generation were felt in the fields of medicine and education.

The cutting edge of the baby boom--the 17.5 million people who are now between the age of 30 to 34--were greeted with waiting lines from 1946-1950. Medical facilities and staffs were totally inadequate. Expectant mothers were forced to wait for space in delivery rooms. Hospital hallways doubled as labor rooms. New construction of medical facilities proliferated. Overbuilding of medical facilities eventually became a problem. To cope with this problem, regional planning councils were eventually instituted to verify needs and authorize the solicitation and expenditure of public funds for construction purposes.

Obstetrics and gynecology merged as the OB-GYN medical specialty. As the baby boom generation marched through childhood, adolescence and

maturity, the new medical interests and specializations of pediatrics, sports medicine, stress and weight reduction emerged.

Both Weller (1981) and Easterlin (1980) agree that the onslaught of the baby boom generation into the 1950's caught the education establishment totally unprepared. Inadequate physical plants forced the proliferation of temporary buildings on elementary, junior high and high school campuses. New construction of educational facilities proliferated.

The 1950's and 1960's found an excess of students and a shortage of teachers as well as facilities. Teacher qualifications were altered to accommodate experience as well as academic preparation. Since teaching positions were easy to get, Jones (1980) stresses that requirements were relaxed. Large classes, crowded classrooms and teacher training methods stimulated experimentation with new methods in educational administration and classroom teaching. Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores began a 20-year decline as educators attempted to cope with the baby boomers.

The year 1964 began the peak demands upon the higher education systems facilities, finances, curriculum and quality. These are demands that will not diminish before 1988.

Some critics (Easterlin, 1980) speculate that college entrance requirements were relaxed because there had to be a place for the "boomers" to go to keep them from being unemployed. One thing is certain, during the period 1964 to 1971, one new junior/community college opened its doors each week. This added classroom inventory, together with open admissions policies, provided "holding tanks" to reduce a hidden employment problem. Under the SER/CETA social programs, some students were paid to go to college.

In the late '60's and mid-70's, the number of college graduates moving into the civilian labor force doubled. The relative earnings of college graduates declined. College was costing more--but was worth less. According to Jones (1980), education had been devalued, not only in quality but also as an investment.

The things that really emerged from higher education in the '60's and '70's were grade inflation and a counterculture. Grade inflation seems to have been a moral protest by the higher education professoriate against the Vietnam War. The counterculture reflected the size of the baby boom generation and its environmental, political and drug awareness. This awareness was facilitated by the higher education establishment.

The Baby Boom and Unemployment

As the baby boomers marched through time and the society, it was discovered that high unemployment and low productivity cannot be blamed entirely on the poor health of the economy. In the 1960's and 1970's the economy was generally expanding. Even with this economic expansion, an employment problem emerged. This employment problem was manifested in the entry-level employment requirements of the emerging high technology society.

Higher education levels created demands for more fulfilling work. The baby boom greatly expanded the youthful working population during the 1970's. Lower productivity was reflected in inexperienced, younger workers. Easterlin (1980) declares that when young persons are disproportionately plentiful in the labor force (a true condition since the 1960's) the average rate of unemployment at entry-level jobs tends to rise.

Labor participation rates for women changed from 28 percent in 1950 to 51 percent by 1978. This situation generally aggravated the growth of unemployment.

The government found that its conventional strategies for dealing with unemployment were no longer effective. If unemployment was relieved, inflation was stimulated. Monetary and fiscal policies such as (1) more available credit for prospective buyers and (2) tax relief measures, served to coin a new concept called staflation. The relationship of unemployment and inflation was changed. Demand-stimulating policies no longer worked--a new dimension was added in the form of supply-side economics. In essence, the baby boomers caused a restructuring of economic thought concerning demand and supply conditions. The affluent position of the boom generation was affected.

Consumer Markets

The baby boomers will be our dominant generation throughout its life span. The baby boomers are most visible during times of the life cycle transition. This generation has provided a visible and reliable marketing target based upon its demographic experience. As they forsake one market, they prime the pump in another market. Marketing practices geared to nostalgia have emerged in the past and will undoubtedly occur again in the future.

Two-income families (a characteristic of the baby boom generation) have greater purchasing power. This purchasing power has stimulated the growth of travel and recreation industries. Two-income families eat out more often.

Baby boomers, because of their education, are trained in rational decision making. They compare, question and analyze. Consequently,

they are less likely to demonstrate brand loyalties and very likely to seek quality.

Crime

The 1960's and 1970's witnessed accelerating crime rates among the baby boomers. Car theft, shoplifting, drugs and burglaries were essentially a youth phenomena. As the baby boom generation matures, the adult phenomena of white collar crime is likely to accelerate.

Entertainment

The exploitation of baby boom fantasies has proven fruitful. Disneyland opened in 1955, the Mouseketeers became popular in the 1960's and "Beach Party" movies became popular in the mid-1960's. The late 1960's and 1970's saw the rise in popularity of horror movies. Then came "Stars Wars" and the video game craze.

Geographic Distribution

According to Weller (1981), during the first half of this century, the population was geograhically centered in and around cities. At the beginning of World War II, about 66 percent of the population lived in urban and metropolitan areas as compared to only 40 percent in 1900. From 1950 to 1975, the Northeast and North Central regions of the U. S. experienced a decline in population. In contrast, the South and West "Sun Belt" regions steadily increased in population as the baby boomers sought greater opportunity and more pleasant living conditions. By 1960, 55.9 percent of the U. S. population lived in the Sun Belt. This proportion had grown to 86 percent by 1976 (Sternlieb and Hughes, 1978, p. 5).

Metropolitan areas have long been recognized as the dominant population growth centers in America. However, a marked transformation

occured after 1970. Weller (1980) indicates that from 1970 to 1976, the nation's metropolitan areas experienced a population growth rate of four percent while the non-metropolitan areas experienced an 8.2 percent population increase. The 1980 census indicated that the rural population growth had grown to 26.3 percent of the national population. This shift to the countryside is referred to as the "Rural Renaissance" and represents a monmentous demographic event. It represents a change in the values and lifestyles of the population. The baby boom generation is the carrier of these changes.

Three main factors appear to be influencing and facilitating the redistribution of the baby boom population: (1) the decentralization of industry away from metropolitan areas, (2) the desirability of rural lifestyles. and (3) the growth of educational opportunities in the non-metropolitan areas.

The Changing American Household

According to Sternlieb and Hughes (1978), the average family size was 3.67 persons per household in 1960. However, by 1980 it appears that there have been fundamental changes in fertility rates and marriage relationships. These changes had reduced the average family size to 3.27 persons per household. Actually, the number of family households decreased from 81.2 percent in 1970 to 73.2 percent in 1980. The non-family households increased from 18.8 percent in 1970 to 26.8 percent by 1980. This growth was largely due to the high divorce rate of the baby boom generation. In 1970 the divorce rate was 47 per 100. In 1980 the divorce rate had grown to 109 per 100. Perhaps the most significant implication to arise from the changing household patterns of the baby boom generation is the quality and types of housing demands.

As the baby boomers caused changes in the makeup and living arrangements of families and groups of people, the demand for homes, apartments and condominiums rose. Between 1970 and 1971, as the baby boomers born in 1946 turned age 25, more than 1.9 million new households were formed. During the 1970's, housing starts were falling further and further behind the demands. On the one hand, inflationary building costs were depressing housing and, on the other hand, the baby boom generation was causing an increasing demand for housing.

Section III. The Future Impacts Of The Baby Boom: 1983-2050

The Demographic Context Of The Future

The present population of the United States is estimated at 230 million persons. With the maintenance of present replacement fertility levels, it is estimated that the population of the United States will grow to 268 million by the year 2000. With present trends, the U. S. population is forecasted to grow to 330 million by the year 2050.

Life expectancy for women is expected to increase from an average of 78.3 years in 1981 to 83.6 years by 2050. At the same time, the life expectancy for men is expected to rise from 70.7 years in 1981 to 75.1 years in 2050.

By 1990, the number of households will increase to 96 million. This represents a 21 percent increase over the 76 million households that existed in 1980.

By the year 2035 it is expected that the number of deaths will about equal the number of births. This trend reflects the aging of the baby boom generation. Consistent with this aging process, the median age of the U. S. population will increase from 30.3 years in 1981 to

36.3 years in the year 2000. It is estimated that the median age of the population will increase to 41.6 years by the year 2050.

Demographic studies indicate that Anglos will comprise 75 percent of the U. S. population by the year 2000 while Asians will comprise about 6 percent of the population. The Hispanic population will be largely concentrated in the Sun Belt region and the Asian population will be dispersed throughout the United States. Within 100 years, it is estimated that Anglos will comprise only 60 percent of the U. S. population.

It is clear that the baby boom generation (and their descendants) will face major political, economic and social difficulties as time progresses.

The Household Of The Future

During the 1980's and 1990's the nation's economic influence will be vested in the 25-44 year old segment of the baby boom generation. In the 1980's 4 of every 9 households will be headed by someone between 35 to 44. According to Jones (1980) these households will represent a "superclass" of well-educated working couples. These professional-managerial couples will command more discretionary income than any other group. Their educational and economic influence will affect (1) dress, (2) entertainment, (3) eating habits, (4) travel, (5) buying patterns, and (6) personal and family values. Jones further asserts that this "superclass" will be a priviledged group who will attain peak earnings and economic power. According to Jones, this group will be in a position to carry out its dreams of affluence.

Consumer Patterns Of The Future

With the influence of the baby boomers in the 1990's we will become a society oriented to the young-old. Youth (and its interests) will not be a deciding factor in economic questions. In the 1990's the 35 to 44 year old age group will consist of 75 million people -- nearly 30 percent of the population! This is the age group that purchases many of the durable goods that bolster the economy. Automobiles, furniture, rugs, housewares, financial services, life insurance and power tools are the durables that the baby boomers will be purchasing in the 1980's and 1990's.

The baby boomers interest in health and fitness will boost demand for expensive frills like health clubs, exercise classes and bicycles. Bowling and other recreational sports that appeal to the middle-aged consumer are beginning to resurge.

The travel industry expects a prosperous period due to the time, inclination and income possessed by the "superclass".

The publishing industry is presently undergoing changes in its market structures as newer publications are directed to the special interests of the "superclass" or baby boomers.

After the year 2000, consumption patterns will change again as the needs and interests of the elderly baby boomers come into a clearer focus. According to Easterlin (1980) the U. S. economy may be embarked on a self-generating cycle of around 40 years. This will include population booms and busts over 20 year intervals.

From a demographic perspective the production and marketing outlook for the economy is very optimistic through the year 2000.

The Political System And The Future

Jones (1980) asserted that the partisan correspondence between parents and the baby boomers has delined. The baby boomers have tended to become more independent and "issue specific" in their political interests. Consequently, it is expected that third-party movements will emerge during the 1980's and 1990's. These third party movements will base themselves on the unaffiliated millions of baby boomers. It is expected that there will be "event" and "issue" politics based less on political ideology and based more on a "what does it do for me?" ideology.

In general, the baby boomers developed an iconoclastic frame of reference as they grew up. They are anti-authoritarian and inclined to prefer more participatory political and governance systems. Computers and telecommunications networks are the technological factors that will facilitate the participatory politics or the middle-aged and elderly baby boomers. It is expected that bitter politics will emerge as the concept or "participatory democracy" (technologically facilitated) clashes with the tradition of "representative democracy".

The Educational System And The Future

The baby boom generation has the distinction of being the most educated generation in the history of the United States. However, changing technological and economic conditions in the 1980's and 1990's will render many of their occupational skills obsolete. Consequently, much of the educational endeavor of the 1980's and 1990's will be focused on the development and delivery of continuing education programs. The higher education system will learn marketing strategies to deliver educational programs to former students and graduates. These

persons will be well educated and seeking additional credentials and occupational upgrading.

In general, pressures are expected to ease on the secondary education system. There is an expected teacher shortage due to the retirement of teachers trained in the 1950's and 1960's.

Educational facilities that were expanded to accommodate the size of the baby boom generation should prove adequate in the future. However, educational facilities that were built to accommodate enrollment driven income resources may prove to be a financial burden in the late 1980's and 1990's.

Due to enrollment and financial problems, as many as 200 of the nation's 450 small liberal arts colleges may be forced to close in the 1980's. Dozens more will be threatened. Three factors are contributing to the enrollment and financial problems being experienced by the liberal arts colleges. These factors are:

1. The baby boom fertility rates in the 1960's.
2. Academic and financial devaluation of the degree.
3. Policies and emphasis upon vocational and technical occupations.

In general, competitive alternatives such as military training (and experience), apprenticeship programs and proprietary schools are now attractive options.

Economic conditions in the 1980's may bring an end to the ambitious attempt to convert higher education from an elitist enterprise to a democratic one.

Employment And The Future

The United States was developed upon the ideology of industrial expansion. It is now making difficult structural change to accommodate a more sustainable society based upon information technology. By the year 2000 it is estimated that 66 percent of the labor force will be engaged in the generation and disemination of knowledge and information. Twenty-two percent of the workforce will be engaged in traditional industrial and manufacturing processes and 10 percent of the workforce will be incolved in providing services. Agriculture and mining will account for 2 percent of the workforce by the year 2000.

The labor force is expected to increase to 120 million persons by 1990 and increase again to 135 million by the year 2000. This increase in the labor force will be mainly due to increased participation by female baby boomers.

Economists worry about the ability to fill jobs in the late 1980's. This suggests that a careful interpretation must be made to reconcile the growing workforce with the inability to fill jobs.

It must be understood that while the workforce is growing in absolute size (due to increased femal participation and population increase) -- it is also aging as function of the baby boom generation. There is likely to be a surplus of entry-level jobs in new or restructured economic enterprises. However, the middle-aged and older baby boomers are not expected to possess the entry-level skills that will characterize the new information technologies. Therefore, the concern with filling the entry-level positions is justified.

The jobs available through the 1990's are likely to be more attractive and intellectually stimulating. Companies may recruit

employees with training programs and special benefit packages. However, once employed, the baby boomers will find that their opportunities for career advancement are limited. Job mobility will be a function of lateral transfers and career changes. The employment counseling business is likely to prosper.

The gain in female labor force participation will be a major contributing factor in the growing demand for child-care services through the 1980's and 1990's. Many educational programs that develop child-caring abilities are already in operation. There is likely to be growth in the construction and development of child-care facilities.

The baby boomers will bring a new work ethic to the job in the 1980's and 1990's. They believe that the employer owes employees not just living, but security and self-fulfillment as well. Their roles will need to be defined by emotional (self-image) needs as well as professional needs. They feel that their role as a producer is as important as their role as a consumer.

The fastest growing employment fields through the year 2000 are those that supply products and services to older, more mature customers. Financial services such as real estate, insurance and banking are top growth prospects.

Social Welfare And The Future

As they approach retirement and continue aging after the year 2010, the baby boomers will challenge and strain every existing program and institution concerned with the welfare or older persons.

Health care is destined to be the number 1 growth industry. It will expand to take care of a lengthening list of health related complaints. It will be expected to supply solutions from eye glasses to heart tests.

Their own impact upon the Social Security system is a minor concern to the baby boomers. The ratio of workers to beneficiaries is expected to fall from 6 to 1 in 1980 to 3 to 1 in the year 2000. By the year 2050 this ratio is conceived to stand at 2 to 1. There is a real potential for intergenrational strife as the retired baby boomers struggle with overtaxed workers for a slice of what may be a smaller pie.

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